

Good evening senator Harp, and Representative Merrill and other members of the committee

My name is Pamella Reid. I am a member of District 1199, the health care workers union, and I work at a day program in Seymour CT for Oak Hill School which is a Private non-profit agency that provides services to people with developmental disabilities. I want to thank you for this opportunity to tell you a little about what I do and my struggles to support my self and care for my clients, who are elderly people with mental retardation.

I have been employed with Oak Hill for 9 years. After all that time, I now make only \$16.31 an hour. fortunately I am able to receive my employer's medical plan. However, in the case of over half of 900 co-workers throughout the state employed by Oak hill are denied access to medical insurance for themselves and/or their family. Why? This is not acceptable. And for those of us who do have medical benefits our employer has told us that at our contract negotiations this year they are going to seek to shift the cost of the medical plan on to employees like myself. We already agreed to increases in our medical and co-pays just a year and a half ago which took up most of the 30 cent raise we received at that time. If I were working directly for the State in a DDS group home, I would be making more than \$24 dollars an hour and paying just \$8.13 a month for insurance. Family insurance would cost me about \$100/month. We do the same work as our

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I have been employed with Oak Hill for 9 years. After all that time, I now make only \$16.31 an hour. While I take my employer's medical plan over half of 900 co-workers at Oak hill have no access to medical insurance at our job, either medical insurance coverage for themselves or their family. How is this possible? This is not unique to our agency it's true for my coworkers throughout the state. And for those of us who do have medical benefits our employer has told us that at our contract negotiations this year they are going to seek to shift the cost of the medical plan on to employees like myself. We already agreed to increases in our medical and co-pays just a year and a half ago which ate up most of the 30 cent raise we received at that time. If I were working directly for the State in a DDS group home, I would be making more than \$24 dollars an hour and paying just \$8.13 a month for insurance. Family insurance would cost me about \$100/month. We do the same work as our counterparts in DDS for the same client population, but for half the wages. At one time, direct care

counterparts in DDS for the same client population, but for half the wages. At one time, direct care givers at private agencies were almost at parity with state worker but now we keep falling further and further behind.

This is just one example of how the state has shifted the burden of the cost of care to the private agencies, through under funding. In turn, the agencies shift cost to the employees. The result is high turnover, massive burnout, people working multiple jobs and disruptions to the quality and continuity for care for our clients. Private agencies have been starved of the funding they need to provide services by the State of Connecticut and those agencies are now starving us.

For this coming year. Governor Rell has put zero funding- no additional money-into the budget for private provider agencies for this year and next year. This was on top of the zero in the budget for us last year. That is 3 years of zeros. This is a cut to our funding. And while the Governor's proposed zeros, even though it haven't actually gone into effect my employer Oak Hill has already transferred the cut from the zero increase from last year into a cut in the services me and my co-workers provides. All over our agency which covers 80 group homes and about 113 day programs like mine, management has already cut workers schedules. Individuals who once were working 40 or 38 hours per week are now only working 36

or less hours because of the under funding. This has meant clients are less able to go out into the community for engaging and stimulating activities because there are not

Unless the legislature funds our programs and ensures that all of that additional funding is dedicated to wages and benefits for direct caregivers, we will see our wages freeze and our insurance costs soar. My clients have 100% health insurance coverage, at no cost to them or their families. It's wonderful that in this state we're committed to providing that care. Why can't we be just as committed to supporting the people like me who are the ones doing the providing.

Thank You

Pamella Reid

